

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

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P R 161335Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7119

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1413

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - T E X T (T H R O U G H O U T)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, LE, IS, US

SUBJECT: THE FUTURE OF SOUTH LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH PIERRE
AND AMIN GEMAYEL

1. AMBASSADOR AND DCM LUNCHEONED WITH PIERRE AND AMIN GEMAYEL ON MARCH 15 (LUNCHEON HAD BEEN ARRANGED PRIOR TO PALESTINIAN TERRORIST ATTACK IN ISRAEL AND ISRAELI REPRISAL). CONVERSATION IMMEDIATELY TURNED TO ISRAELI ATTACK IN SOUTH LEBANON MARCH 14, AND POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES. AMIN, WHO WAS CLEARLY PLEASED THAT ISRAELIS WERE STRIKING STRONG BLOW AT PALESTINIANS IN THIS AREA, SAID THERE WERE TWO POSSIBLE RESULTS. ON THE ONE HAND, THE ISRAELIS MIGHT SIMPLY CLEAN OUT SOUTHERN LEBANON AND THEN WITHDRAW, IN WHICH CASE SITUATION WOULD SIMPLY RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE. (THROUGHOUT CONVERSATION, AMIN SEEMED TO BE ASSUMING THAT ISRAELIS WOULD INITIALLY TAKE CONTROL OF ALL OF LEBANON SOUTH OF THE LITANI.) ON THE OTHER HAND, ISRAEL MIGHT DECIDE TO STAY LONG ENOUGH TO ASSURE THAT THIS REGION
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REMAINED PERMANENTLY SAFE FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW. THERE WERE TWO WAYS, HE SAID, IN WHICH THIS COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED: ISRAELIS THEMSELVES COULD STAY IN THE AREA INDEFINITELY; OR THEY COULD INVITE LEBANESE ARMY TO TAKE OVER. AMIN THOUGHT THAT ONCE THE ISRAELIS HAD ELIMINATED THE PALESTINIAN ARMED PRESENCE IN THE AREA, THE LEBANESE ARMY WOULD BE CAPABLE OF PERFORMING WHAT

WOULD BE A PURELY POLICE FUNCTION. DCM MENTIONED THAT THERE WAS A THIRD POSSIBILITY, THAT IS, A UNITED NATIONS FORCE. AMIN REPLIED THAT THIS WOULD BE "IDEAL," BUT SHEIKH PIERRE INDICATED THAT OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES MIGHT NOT AGREE.

2. RETURNING TO THE IDEA OF A LEBANESE TAKE OVER IN THE SOUTH, AMBASSADOR ASKED WHETHER ARMY WAS STRONG ENOUGH. AMIN SAID THAT IF LAF NEEDED HELP, "WE" (READ THE CHRISTIANS) COULD PROVIDE 2000 MILITIAMEN FOR THIS PURPOSE. SHEIKH PIERRE AGREED, NOTING THAT THEY COULD BE ENROLLED INTO THE LEBANESE ARMY IF NECESSARY.

3. AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT THE KEY PROBLEM IN ALL OF THIS SPECULATION WAS WHAT WOULD BECOME OF THE 5,000-10,000 ARMED PALESTINIAN FIGHTERS WHO HAD BEEN IN SOUTH LEBANON. SOME MIGHT BE KILLED IN THE PRESENT FIGHTING, BUT THE GREAT BULK WERE ALMOST CERTAINLY WITHDRAWING NORTHWARD. UNLESS THESE MEN COULD BE NEUTRALIZED, ANY LEBANESE ARMY IN THE SOUTH WOULD BE IN GREAT DANGER OF BEING CUT OFF FROM THE NORTHERN HALF OF THE COUNTRY. THE ONLY FORCE CAPABLE OF CONTROLLING THE PALESTINIANS AND PREVENTING THIS WAS THE SYRIAN ADF TROOPS. THE GEMAYELS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SYRIAN COOPERATION WAS ESSENTIAL AND AGREED THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY COULD BE SAFELY STATIONED IN SOUTH LEBANON ONLY IF THERE WERE AT

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LEAST A TACIT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, THE SYRIANS AND THE ISRAELIS. (PIERRE, HOWEVER, DID NOT THINK THAT SYRIANS WOULD ACTIVELY KEEP PALESTINIANS UNDER CONTROL. HE DOUBTED THEIR ABILITY TO DO SO EVEN IF THEY WANTED.) AMIN GEMAYEL IN PARTICULAR URGED THAT THE UNITED STATES UNDERTAKE THE ROLE OF MIDDLEMAN IN TRYING TO ARRANGE SUCH A SETTLEMENT.

4. SHIEKH PIERRE OPENED AND CLOSED CONVERSATION WITH HIS FAMILIAR LITANY ABOUT THE DANGERS OF COMMUNISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN GENERAL AND LEBANON IN PARTICULAR AND THE NECESSITY FOR THE UNITED STATES TO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS. SHEIKH AMIN REPEATED HIS PRINCIPAL THEME OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE PHALANGE PARTY, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS THE LARGEST AND BEST-ORGANIZED POLITICAL PARTY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

5. COMMENT:

A. THE ISRAELI AIR ATTACK ON AWZA'I OCCURRED DURING THE LUNCHEON AND THE NOISE OF THE BOMBS FALLING ABOUT A

MILE AWAY MADE CONVERSATION A LITTLE STRAINED FOR ABOUT
20 MINUTES.

B. THE GEMAYELS, PARTICULARLY AMIN, ARE CLEARLY HOPING
THEY CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ISRAELI ATTACK TO IMPRIVE
THEIR POLITICAL AND MILITARY POSITIONS IN LEBANON.
PARKER

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